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LETTERS FROM POLAND TO THE VOICE OF MADRID

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The great number of Polish letters received throughout the year by the Polish foreign-broadcast section of Radio Madrid undoubtedly constitutes authentic and articulate evidence of the present situation and of the feeling of the Polish people.

The Polish program has been in existence since January 1949, but the letters which arrived during the first months of its operation came almost exclusively from Polish emigre centers. The first letter from Poland came in February 1949, but the correspondence did not begin to assume large proportions until June and July. By the end of spring 1950, over a thousand letters arrived (not counting the letters from emigrants), and among these some were long enough to be called complete papers, if not detailed reports.

Approximately 80 percent of all the letters come from regions on the left bank of the Wisla River, whereas few come from the Lubin, Podlasie, and Bialystok areas. There are a few exhibition pieces among them; for example, a letter from Stanislawow and one even from a certain place beyond the Urals. It is hardly necessary to add that these letters made a long and rather complex journey before they reached their destination. When the broadcasts were started, it was seriously expected that it might not be possible to establish direct contact with Poland at all. Who could have foreseen then that one day we would receive a message from the remote Siberian steppes!

The correspondents vary greatly in age, but it must be stressed that the percentage of school youth (nonuniversity) is constantly growing. The intelligentsia constitutes but an insignificant minority among the letter writers, the great majority of whom are workers and peasants and not infrequently people who handle a pen only with difficulty. The letters are usually signed with comic pseudonyms.

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A favorable attitude toward the Madrid program is expressed in a variety of ways, ranging from enthusiastic approval to sympathetic criticism, as shown in the following statements:

"At least for this half hour, a man can be transformed into another world," writes a constant correspondent from Olask, "a world where one can breathe the fresh air so very necessary to us today, for here we always feel as though there were only an endless succession of rainy days."

"In our town" (the town in question is a city in the Recovered Territories), "the Madrid broadcasts are still being listened to by a very large proportion of the population."

"Of all the Polish-language broadcasts from abroad, the Madrid broadcasts hold first place with respect to general standards, validity of the problems discussed, and their uncompromising attitude toward our affairs."

"At last we have a Polish program with a truly heartening content, for what we have been receiving over the air until now has been very vague and empty."

"I have spoken with scores of persons in our town (Lodz) on the subject of Madrid and everyone of them said: 'Madrid broadcasts the best program from abroad.'"

"Remember that simply hundreds of thousands of Poles listen to you," announces a post card from the Brda-Notec region "for at least four to eight of our countrymen gather at 2030 at every radio receiver to be strengthened by your broadcasts; sometimes they have to walk from one village to another and sink in mud up to their knees. The day before yesterday, I spoke with a repatriate from L'vov who reaffirmed the fact that in L'vov also you have many listeners who eagerly await your program."

"Listening to Madrid is becoming more and more popular throughout Poland. We are thinking of organizing sessions so that the school children can listen to Madrid."

"Many members of the regime even listen to the Madrid broadcasts with interest."

"You sound as though you were here with us living through this horrible nightmare."

"Were it not for the censorship practiced by the Communist regime and the fear of reprisals by the UB, you would receive thousands of letters."

Quite frequently, a favorable appraisal of the Madrid programs accompanies unfavorable criticism of other foreign radio stations.

"Those from London or from the US are incapable of speaking to us in your kind of language. We listen to you now as a year ago we listened only to the 'Voice of America.' But today Poles are beginning to hate the US for its indifference to their slavery."

"No one wants to listen to England anymore, for it only brings disillusionment and frustration."

"Your broadcasts are best of all; the others are just time wasted in listening. Tell France that its programs are banal. As for the US, they should get off the air instead of wasting men's time with their performances."

Within those 17 months, a few insulting letters also came, but they could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

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Letters come from Russians and Ukrainians who listen willingly to the Polish-language broadcasts from Madrid because Russian broadcasts are jammed by powerful interference.

The striking feature of most letters is the primitive hatred of the Soviets and of Communism. Everyone has something to report about the cruelty of the Bolsheviks, about their excesses, and about the outrages committed by the Soviet Army. Almost everyone asks that his letter be read over the radio "so that the whole world may know."

"Tell the workers of Italy, France, and Spain," writes a miner from Gorny Slask, half illiterate, though his Polish is good, "tell them that no matter how badly off they may be not to listen to Communist propaganda, for only under this regime would they know what a real hell is like."

Undoubtedly the nomination of Rokossovskiy, which was considered a definite about-face in the Sovietization policy, caused a psychic quake throughout the country. The coming of a Red marshal, and the famous letter from Stalin to Wilhelm Pieck, aroused considerable uneasiness. A powerful campaign against the Church also contributed to the growth of pessimism.

"Even a year ago," we read in a letter signed 'Workers from Slask,' "many of us believed the promises and the propaganda, and even joined the party. Today, only a small percentage of true Communists remain, and they are the ones who sell themselves to make a career. This change has taken place for two reasons. One is the fraternization of our government with the Germans. Even a year ago many believed that the government meant well for us, but now everyone just boils inside to think they have forgotten German murders, the camps of Treblinka, Oswiecim, and Palmira, the executions on the streets, the burning of Warsaw. This opened our eyes, but good! Now they will probably give all of Slask to the Swabians. They were to sell houses in the cities, but now everything has been stopped. Farms, too, were supposed to be assigned as private property. The second reason for the changed attitude is the Communists' fight with religion. Our women were the first to protest. Almost everyone has been to confession. The priests heard confessions all night long during religious celebrations, and on Palm Sunday, Communion lasted a whole half hour. Young and old took part; among them were many who never used to go to church before. Those miners who came from France are sorry they came and would go back right away if they could, even though the Communists try to please them as best they can. Maybe you gentlemen will find out for yourselves one day that we are writing the truth, because there must be some change soon. People can't stand this sort of thing for long. They talk more and more about war, so maybe it will come."

The growth of religious feeling, about which the Slask miner writes, is evident in all the letters, regardless of the writer's age, origin, or social status.

Complaints about the steadily worsening economic situation are another dominant feature of the majority of the letters.

"We are being exploited by the Russians. There is nothing to be had in our stores but there is constant talk about exceeding the production plan and about turning out 200 or 300 percent of the quota. Where does it all go to, then?"

"Living conditions are rotten. A worker who puts in an 8-hour day, including Sundays and holidays, earns 12,000 - 13,000 zlotys a month. A kilogram of meat costs 480 zlotys; sausage, 400 to 500 zlotys; and bread, 48 zlotys a kilogram. A suit of cheapest quality costs 10,000 zlotys; a pair of shoes, 6,000 to 10,000 zlotys, but they are of such poor quality that they soon go to pieces. We get meat on rations, 150 grams per person for a week. That much meat is not enough for a dog or a cat. Life is just wonderful in a 'People's Democracy.'"

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"On the first of January, they increased our earnings 5 percent and increased the price of meat, lard, and ham from 30 to 60 percent, the price of wool 35 percent, etc."

"We earn very little. If I, with a family of eight, get 11,400 zlotys, they take off about a thousand. With contributions to the party, which we are terrorized into joining, the press, the trade unions, etc., all that remains is about 10,000 zlotys."

"The NKVD has a separate store where its members can get everything, but for the workers there is nothing except lice and starvation. That's equality for you! Save us, world, while there is still time!"

Many letters cite examples of economic waste caused by neglect and the overexpansion of party bureaucracy.

"They piled grain in a shed to a height of 10 meters; of course, the grain rotted. The peasant got nothing, the worker got nothing, the state got nothing. Bread was made from moldy rye, but who cares about the worker's lot!"

"They cram hundreds of pigs into freight cars and haul them without water and without food. Before they reach their destination, half of the pigs die and are used for fertilizer while the worker gets 50 grams of meat for the entire week."

Judging by the letters received, it appears that the emigre press does not fully portray the growing intimidation by the police.

"You emigres," writes a worker from Slask, "hear only about the bigger trials but only we who live here know what happens every day. Those who cross the border tell only a small part of what is really taking place. When it's a question of arrests, they know only about the prominent persons, but there are continuous arrests of people of various social levels, and especially of the little people. Nobody knows that many are hanged. Nobody knows that they take the kind of person who might have complained that there is no meat or butter, and you can't even tell anymore who's behind you when you are standing in a queue. If you're lucky, they come to your home, make a thorough search, and order you to sign a statement that you will voluntarily leave town within 24 hours, with your mouth shut tight ..."

"Whoever does not go to the movies to see a Soviet film is politically suspected and at the first opportunity he will be accused of sabotage and find himself in jail."

"In the Wujek mine near Katowice the workers refused to fill the inhuman quota for coal mining. The hangmen from the UB arrived and used guns. Six workers were killed and 14 wounded; on the Bolshevik side, one Red policeman fell."

"I am afraid to give you my real name because I might find myself in Milecin, as a true Pole who does not praise the People's Democracy is killed off in Milecin. I spoke with a friend who had been in there. When he told about that camp, my hair stood on end."

"In one of the county towns there is terrific commotion. A great trial is taking place under martial law, before a military tribunal. The defendants are three children, two boys and a girl, school children from the lower high school grades. The girl is in a girl scout dress and one of the boys is in a scout uniform. The prosecutor accuses them in severest tones: 'They aimed deliberately to abolish by force the people's rule in Poland.' This is the story. At a

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nearby railroad station, after a quarrel among some Soviet soldiers, who wander about here like homeless dogs, some shooting took place. In the course of the shooting, two Bolshevik officers were killed and several were wounded. Polish flunkies promptly obeyed a Moscow order and Polish soldiers were shot. This situation aroused general anger and was heatedly discussed. Naturally, it was most strong among the young. The Bolsheviks decided, therefore, to shut all mouths at one stroke. They spotted these three. The whole case was that these three were saying that the Russians are killing Polish soldiers and that it's bad in Siberia. The court recognized their guilt and sentenced them. The boy and girl, who were talking about these events, each got 2 years in prison. The other boy, who listened to the conversation and nodded his head, got a year in prison. These are facts and I can supply other details."

One can observe in these letters, almost from month to month, the growing political oppression, which encroaches more and more upon the most private aspects of everyday life. Since autumn, 1950, there has appeared a marked change in the tone and mood of most letters. Growing weariness and hopelessness become apparent, though there is no lack of letters full of spirit and faith in the future. These, however, for some time past, have been in the minority.

People are tired of the insistent, blatant propaganda from which there is no escape.

"We, here in the homeland, can stand it no longer. No one can believe the propaganda, but under the pressure of the party and of Security Police revolvers the Polish population is coerced in every way."

"Where I work, 75 percent of us are party members as I am. They have to belong because their life and livelihood depend on it."

"I am a member of the Communist union, the (Union of Polish Youth) ZMP, and a member of the PZPR. The Communist meetings nauseate me. The Communist regime broke many of our young people, but that is only on the surface; in our hearts we are true Poles despite everything."

"They herd people into meetings, get out a previously prepared resolution, and read it aloud; then they ask who is against the resolution and since there are no such brave souls, the resolution is adopted unanimously and sent to the press. What we don't approve spontaneously! Resolutions against warmongers, against the oppression of the working class in the rotten West, against abuses in Caritas, and against the meddling of the clergy in politics."

"It's impossible to stand this disgusting propaganda, these constant Soviet lectures, Soviet plays, and Soviet films at every step."

"Under Hitler's occupation we could hope at least that one day all that would end. Now that hope is very slim."

"We are tired of the constant meetings, the incessant propaganda, the innumerable resolutions, always 'unanimous' and always 'voluntary.' We can only grit our teeth and wait for a better future. This tension is becoming more and more exhausting for all of us."

"I am a student and, of course, I belong to the ZMP. Almost all of us belong, for otherwise it would be difficult for us to graduate. I attend meetings regularly although it is a great strain because sometimes a man could vomit from all their talk."

"It was better under Hitler because one could at least fight and die, but the kind of life we have now is probably worse than death!"

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The percentage of letters which express bitterness toward the West is comparatively low; we can assume however, that under normal conditions for correspondence this percentage would be much greater.

"We want to know when all this will end, we don't want to listen to words of consolation."

"Don't console us with words. Console us rather with action. Free us from the yoke of our oppression. This we expect and demand of those for whose cause we fought. Don't feed us with empty phrases."

"The Communists frequently employ the expression 'rotten West,' and not without a reason, for if a person knows how to proclaim slogans, but does not know how to fight for them, then he exposes to disparagement the things he believes in. There is, therefore, a grain of truth in Communist propaganda against the West."

"Yes, we know that we are being robbed, but what do you have to offer us? What is the fuss about? Only about one's own position; one walks to power over dead bodies, promising freedom and prosperity to the simple-minded, but when one finally sits firmly in the saddle, one tightens the reins. In the West they are supposedly sorry for us and sympathize with us. Let them worry about themselves!"

A large number of correspondents pay particular attention to those programs which poke fun at Marxist phraseology and Soviet slogans, and which caricature typical propaganda tricks.

"We want more criticism, satire, and humor at the expense of the Stalinist puppets in Warsaw," writes a 'Worker from the Recovered Territories.' "Let the 'elderly gentleman' with his jokes appear more often on the program. We like to listen to him and he cheers us up a little in our slavery."

"I can't imagine the Madrid broadcasts without the humor and satire of the 'elderly gentleman.'"

"Tell the truth about the Soviets and inform public opinion in the Western countries." This is an imperative plea to be found in almost every letter.

"During the German occupation, we lived on BBC broadcasts on the work of our government-in-exile. We have since had 4 years of 'freedom'. The Polish white and red banners have been gradually supplanted by the Red flag, and the national anthem by the Internationale. Our people have been dulled by the pressure of mere existence. Polish emigres in Great Britain are looked upon as a politically bankrupt group. Many returned with the platitude, 'Poland can be rebuilt only by those inside Poland.' Where does the truth lie? Perhaps you have freed yourselves from inertia and are capable of concrete achievements. This seems to be borne out by the Madrid program. Don't become too proud of yourselves; you have still far to go before you can say that you are the exclusive spokesmen of the Polish people. The moral capital which had been lost for these or other reasons must be regained systematically with an even greater dependence upon home."

"We should like to see in you the kind of people who do not let events take them by surprise, but who anticipate the future and protect the nation from the treacherous novelties of tomorrow. We don't know what the future will bring us here at home; pessimism has become our lot. We constantly expect new blows and a steady worsening of our situation. We don't want words of consolation, but concrete facts on which to construct predictions."

As a rule, the correspondents are interested in the doings of the great powers, not in the backyard on the emigration. No names are mentioned. The Mikolajczyk affair is passe. There is one exception. The name of General

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Wladyslaw Anders occurs frequently, particularly in letters from young people. Monte Cassino, the revocation of Polish citizenship by the regime, and the constant attacks in the press must have done their work.

A series of broadcasts designed for young people has met with instantaneous and warm reception, mainly from school children.

"Our spirit is good," writes a 17-year-old boy, "and when the word is given, we shall fight and die, if necessary, for our country."

A group sends the following round robin: "We know that we must act very discretely. We form small groups of three or four to resist Bolshevik infection, and to be ready when the proper time comes. The majority of the young people in our area belong to the ZMP. About 10 percent are activists scattered throughout county, regional, or school administrations. About 90 percent are in the ZMP for material gain only. About 60 percent are opposed to the present order. Many of these have clearly defined views on Bolshevism and belong to the ZMP either to mask their real views or to fight the enemy from within. The rest are young people who are indifferent, undecided, or uninformed about Bolshevism."

The older generation writes a great deal about the young. "I don't want to let my children join a Communist organization, but I know that without that they won't be able to go on studying. What shall I do? After all, I must give them an education!"

"In your broadcasts, one can detect a great concern for the young. Although the problem is serious, it is not hopeless because we apply an antidote for the poison which our children are fed, and we hope to be able to maintain them in a fair state of health."

"I refused to join the ZMP and therefore was expelled from school. I have not been studying for a whole year now. Excuse my spelling mistakes, for I lack education. My friends hate the Communists, but, nevertheless, they belong to the organization to be able to complete their education. When Poland regains its independence, will all those who joined the Communists for selfish reasons have the same right as those who didn't?"

For a couple of months now, some letters have contained sentiments which were absent before -- ideas about an active struggle and forecasts of armed skirmishes. This would seem to substantiate the claim that the ever-increasing Soviet pressure will again result in 'taking to the woods' on a large scale.

"I live in the memories of my beloved partisan days," a 'listener from the Swietokrzyskie Mountains' assures us. "Tell us whether it is time to organize an underground movement because, by now, we are ready for everything. If you could only give us definite instructions as to what we should do. We are 18 and 19 years old. Greetings to General Anders."

"We should like to get in touch with our government abroad and get instructions on our activity." Signature: the name of the organization and a seal.

"I want to establish contact with the underground. We should not wait; we must act, for only a struggle will give us liberty. I think that I shall find the kind of people I am looking for. For death is better than persecution by the security policy and slavery."

"We have had enough starvation, misery, and subjugation under the Communists. We have decided to fight; how, the future will tell."

"We workers intend to give these brigands a bloody Saturday, though we know that later they will thin our ranks. If we could only get some technical assistance from somewhere. Spring is coming; we must do something ..."

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It is typical that until the last few months, no such matters were mentioned in any of the letters. The increased tempo of sovietization, which began last autumn, is reflected in the correspondence in two ways. Some letters verge on despair; in others there is a persistent thought of renewing an armed struggle. As usual, when we pay attention to the extreme cases, there is danger of oversimplification and generalization, but let us not forget that only a few months have passed since the Plenum of the Central Committee appointed Rokossovskiy and began a general offensive in the fields of culture and education. Time will show whether some of the tendencies which are to be found in the letters quoted above will grow, or whether they are only individual outbursts that are not indicative of the attitude of the masses.

The question arises as to what extent this correspondence is a true and complete reflection of the existing state of affairs. Its sincerity cannot be doubted. On the other hand, it can hardly be assigned a value that an all-inclusive poll would be given. It may be assumed that those people who have been completely broken by disillusionment, exhaustion, and apathy, and have come to terms with their environment, do not listen to broadcasts from abroad, and most certainly do not write letters. The enthusiastic response of our young listeners likewise should not lead us to optimistic conclusions. We may read these letters like a needle on the seismograph if we allow for certain corrections and amplifications.

One thing is certain, the country is becoming more restive. This is partly explained by the lack of psychological preparation for such a quick tempo of sovietization. Under such conditions, a rebirth of the underground is not only possible, but highly probable.

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